

A Weekend in the Country: Dept of Social Psychology's Annual Academic Retreat

blogs.lse.ac.uk/psychologylse/2015/02/17/a-weekend-in-the-country-dept-of-social-psychologys-annual-academic-retreat/

17/02/2015

PhD candidate [Terressa Whitney](#) reflects on the Department of Social Psychology annual academic retreat to Cumberland Lodge.

I quickly fell under the spell of Cumberland Lodge while on my first departmental retreat back in the November of 2011. Every fall, a merry company of Social Psychology faculty, PhD and newly arrived MSc students descend upon the lodge for a weekend of theory, methodology, and community building. Faculty from each MSc stream present their on-going research to PhD and MSc students – material that is oftentimes not included in course lectures. Students are given the opportunity to engage with the faculty and each other, discussing the presented material and gaining insights into the field of social psychology. Discussions spill over into conversations over meals, a drink, or country walks.

The amazing academic discussions are made all the more memorable by the surroundings in which they occur. The royal lodge is situated in Great Windsor Park, just down the road from Windsor Castle. And, if you're lucky enough, you may even spot the landlady, HRM the Queen of England. Being fresh off the boat in 2011 and having grown up watching far too many BBC period dramas, I was quite enamoured with the idea of royal estates and the possibility of spotting a queen (far more exciting than spotting comedian Jimmy Fallon at my local coffee shop in Brooklyn).



My first retreat was a whirlwind – I had just jumped into the world of Social Psychology and had so many questions. I couldn't believe that I was able to spend the whole weekend listening to the faculty present on-going research and discuss it with them over dinner or at the bar. I was also extremely grateful for the opportunity to really get to know my fellow students. I had just moved country and knew absolutely no one, so being able to make friends that weekend meant the world to me. Not to mention the fact that I actually *did* get to see the Queen as she greeted everyone who attended services at her chapel that Sunday. I left with a renewed sense of excitement, eager to dive into my new life at LSE.

Fast-forward to my final departmental retreat, November 2014. I'm now an 'old hat,' having helped organize the weekend for the past three years. Faculty are still presenting their current research projects to eager students, everyone still continues theoretical and methodological debates over lunch and dinner (breakfast is always more subdued), and we all still clamour over course options, advisors, and practical applications of theory at the bar. And, of course, we still giggle excitedly as we compare our assigned bedrooms. Student digs pale in comparison to the lodge's antique-clad estate rooms.

This year, however, we introduced something a little new. We PhD's were given our own presentation timeslot, and we wanted to make it something special. Reflecting on our MSc experiences and our roles at G/TA's, we decided to give the weekend a bit of a personal touch and discuss our 'research trajectories' – what brought us to where we are now, how we chose our subjects and supervisors, and where we (hope we) are going. To our delight, it was warmly received by the MSc students – our discussion went overtime and spilled into lively conversations at the bar. We discussed work experience, job-hunting tips, suggested literature, and brainstormed MSc dissertation ideas. It has,

in fact, received extremely positive feedback from the MSc cohort, and will be taken forward in future years.

I always leave the annual retreat with mixed feelings. I'm relieved to go home, exhausted from all the wonderful conversations and lack of sleep. But I'm also sorry to leave the fresh country air, long walks, warm fireplaces, and academic energy. I will always look back fondly on our weekends in the country, as they have been a highlight of my PhD experience, and I am glad to see them move forward in such a positive direction.

- Copyright © 2015 London School of Economics

